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ABSTRACT

Much has been written about how counselors can become more multiculturally competent in their research, practice, and academic training. To date, great changes have taken place in the integration of multicultural issues into coursework, publications, and research. The next step for counselors is to include that of social activist along side of the other roles. This paper argues the need for structured, social activism training to be included in the curricula of graduate programs in counseling psychology. Several points are addressed that provide support for this position. One point stresses an understanding of the political forces and events that affect lives. Another stresses that culturally competent counselors have a role to play in social activism. A proposed social activism-training example to be integrated into counseling and psychology curricula is also presented. (Contains 14 references.) (Author/JDM)

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SYMPOSIUM: Current Practices and Innovative Approaches in Cross-Cultural Counseling Training

Integrating Social Activism into Multiculturally Competent Counselor Training

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Integrating Social Activism into Multiculturally Competent Counselor Training

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Close cooperation between theoretical and applied psychology can be accomplished if the theorist does not look toward applied problems with highbrow aversion or with a fear of social problems, and if the applied psychologist realizes that there is nothing so practical as a good theory. Kurt Lewin

Since the publication of the seminal position paper by Sue, Bernier, Duran, Feinberg, Pedersen, Smith, & Vazquez-Nuttall, (Cross-Cultural Counseling Competencies) in the 1982 Counseling Psychologist, much has been written on how social service providers can become more multiculturally competent in terms of their research, practice, and academic training (Arredondo, Toporek, Brown, Jones, Locke, Sanchez, & Stadler, 1996; Sue, Arredondo, & McDavis, 1992; Sue, & Sue, 1999). A great deal has been done to operationalize Sue et al.'s (1982) proposed competencies: multicultural competency ethical standards have been established (Arrendondo, et al. 1996), multicultural competency training programs have been created (See AMCD website; Ridley, Mendoza & Kanitz, 1994), multicultural competency instruments have been normed and validated (Constantine & Ladany, 2000; Sodowsky, Taffe, Gutkin, Wise, 1994) - all of which have transformed the proverbial multicultural talk into multicultural walk. As a result, great changes have taken place, such as the thoughtful integration of multicultural issues into coursework, publications and research that incorporate multicultural paradigms and questions, increased attendance and scholarly

presentations of multicultural information at conferences and in-services, growing participation on university or community multicultural committees, the practice of multiculturally conceptualized counseling & therapy, etc.

The aforementioned behaviors and actions have been crucial to the current state of the multicultural counseling field. Everyone who has been involved in the fruition of these efforts has acted in some way for social change. In order to assure the continued progress of this movement, leading scholars in the field are calling for the reconceptualization of the current role of social service provider so that it equally includes that of social activist alongside scientist/practitioner (D'Andria, 1999; 2000; D'Andrea & Arredondo, 2000; Lewis, 2000; Sloan, 1996; Sue, Arredondo, & McDavis, 1992). This being the case, the authors of this paper draw special attention to the need for structured, social activism training to be included into the curricula of graduate programs in psychology. The next section provides support for this position followed by a proposed social activism-training example to be integrated into counseling and psychology curricula.

Sue, Arredondo, & McDavis (1992) have proposed 31 cross-cultural competencies and objectives. The primary areas of competence fall under the categories of attitudes, beliefs, knowledge and skills that the counselor possesses about his/her own cultural background and that of the client's. Within their Skills section of Appropriate Intervention Strategies and Techniques, attention is given to the sociopolitical responsibilities and realities of the counselor, so that the counselor would be "cognizant of" and actively "work to eliminate biases, prejudices, and discriminatory practices" (p. 643). D'Andrea and Arredondo (2000) specifically point to the cross-cultural counseling

competencies to argue that social activism "is indeed an important role and responsibility culturally competent counselors are called upon to play in their work" (p. 37). Since counseling doesn't occur within a vacuum, each individual has "a responsibility in understanding the political forces and events that affect not only our personal but professional lives as well" (Sue, Arrendondo & McDavis, 1992, p. 628). Such statements capture the importance of the counselor taking an active role toward fighting social injustices and oppression, both inside and outside of the counseling room.

D'Andrea (2000) has further argued that the counseling psychologist's role of scientist/practitioner be expanded to include that of social activist and advocate. From this role he posits that "preventive and proactive mental health intervention strategies (be) intentionally designed to foster the healthy development of large numbers of persons who are identified as being at-risk for various psychological and social problems" (p.11).

The authors of this paper agree entirely with the abovementioned scholars: that social activist be as fundamental to the counseling psychologist's role as the words scientist and practitioner. To insure this, the authors propose that culturally competent counselor training include activities and educational experiences that promote not only the greater understanding of the socio/political/cultural realities of the world in which we practice, but also educational experiences that teach the how-to's of social activism so that one may learn to become more socially active as a counselor or psychologist. The April, 2001 issue of the Monitor on Psychology provides an example of how more and more faculty are training their students in the practices of advocacy, the legislative process, and how psychology impacts public decision making. A professor of a mental health and public policy course at Washington University, Danny Wedding, Ph.D

organizes a mock testimony at the end of each semester where his students are required to present a policy issue before Congress. In addition, the National Council of Schools and Programs (NCSPP) is in the works of establishing curriculum recommendations that would focus on integrating advocacy ideas into professional psychology classrooms (Chamberlin, 2001). Such integration is never an easy task. Mixing politics and psychology continues to present difficult issues as we are challenged to work outside the boundaries of our "traditional" roles as psychologists (Brydon-Miller, 1997). Not that programs in counseling and psychology should force students to accept or become active around certain social/political/cultural issues, but they should assist students in developing the necessary skills to integrate social activism into their day to day science and practice of psychology. By recognizing that the practice of social activism (not just the understanding of socio/political/cultural forces and events) is an actual multicultural competency, we as a field are obliged to make the necessary changes so that such practices are done in a well-informed manner. The integration of social activist training into professional counseling and psychology curricula would help the field of multicultural counseling to take yet another positive, forward and active step in fulfilling one of its goals to "level the playing field."

Proposed Class Project

Within the context of a multicultural counseling theories course, we propose that a social activism component be integrated that focuses on (a) defining social activism, (b) reviewing the history of social activism within psychology, (c) studying prominent activists who have organized movements of social change, (d) providing basic education on participatory action research (PAR) and (e) teaching the logistics of engaging in social activism initiatives. Consistent with the PAR model, students will explore, design and possibly implement a project that is both professionally and personally meaningful. After a critical review of the literature in their area, students will be required to draft a vision/mission statement of their project (summary of project's purpose, issue or group that project is targeting, etc.), formulate general goals that will help fulfill the mission, prioritize goals & draft a list of actions for each goal. Finally, students will critically analyze all possible sides of the issue and based on theory and research, formulate a rational point-by-point response to any opposing arguments. Projects will be presented to the class for feedback and guidance.

Suggested Readings

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